SERVICE PLAN

Fiscal Years 2015/2016 - 2017/2018

Office of the Ombudsperson

Presented to the

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
November 25, 2014

Ombudsperson
B.C.'s Independent Voice For Fairness

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Message from the Ombudsperson

"...the Office of the Ombudsperson was established to independently and impartially enhance and promote administrative fairness in public authorities in British Columbia...the rights of British Columbians to fair, reasonable and respectful treatment by public authorities promotes fair, accountable government and confidence in the democratic process..."

Proclamation of Fairness Week
November 24 – 28, 2014

This Service Plan focuses on timely and effective delivery of services and meeting key performance measures. It provides for an expansion of advisory and consultative support dependent on the availability of resources. It builds on the successes outlined in the Ombudsperson Annual Report 2013-2014.

2013/14 and 2014/15 have been a time of significant change for the Office of the Ombudsperson. In part this is due to the retirement of several senior managers and the unplanned departure of other staff to positions of greater responsibility within the broader public service. While these departures have provided some flexibility in budgetary pressures they have also slowed the office's ability to achieve progress on some goals, priorities and initiatives.

2013/2014 remained however a productive and successful year for the office. The number of inquiries and complaints received increased to 7,688. This pattern of increase has continued in the first half of 2014/2015.

The office issued two systemic reports in 2013/2014. The first titled *"Time Matters"* focused on the adverse consequences of delays by the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation in completing its reconsideration process. All the recommendations made were accepted. The investigation resulted in a regulatory change, reimbursement to more than 900 ministry clients of $350,000 in lost benefits, and a commitment by the Ministry to review and improve the accuracy of decisions made at the first level about persons with disability status.

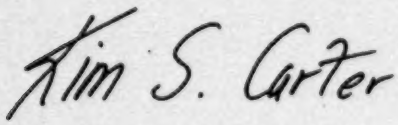
The second systemic report titled *"Striking a Balance"* looked at the role of the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations in ensuring an environmental protection program, the Riparian Area Regulation, was effectively and fairly administered. Our office identified a lack of oversight, training, information and reporting. Twenty four of the twenty-five recommendations made were accepted.

At the same time older systemic reports into local government meetings titled *"Open Meetings"* and into home and community care for seniors *"The Best of Care: Part 2"* continued to generate interest and positive outcomes. In 2014/2015 the Ministry of Health for the first time provided detailed responses to the recommendations made in *"The Best of Care: Part 2"*. Currently the office is engaged in a systemic investigation into the oversight of Private Career Training Institutions in British Columbia.

Our office's expertise and leadership continued to be recognized in the broader Ombuds community. We were asked to present a workshop at the bi-annual Forum of Canadian Ombudsman Conference on Systemic Investigations for the Smaller Office. In addition we were asked to participate in instructing on the professional Osgoode Ombuds Certificate Course.

There was increased outreach to different communities across the province. Three tours were completed in the East Kootenays (Elkford to Invermere); the Greater Vancouver area; and the Merritt/Okanagan area. These tours had a particular focus on engaging with communities whose members are new to British Columbia or whose first language is not English. In each community visited we opened an Ombudsperson Office for the day to enhance accessibility.

In 2014/2015 as we celebrate the office's 35th year of service to the people of British Columbia I look forward to our office's continued contribution to fair and reasonable treatment, effective public administration, and good governance in British Columbia.



Kim Carter
Ombudsperson
Province of British Columbia

Vision, Mandate and Guiding Principles

Legislative Framework

Ombudsperson Act

Vision

British Columbia's Independent Voice for Fairness

Mandate

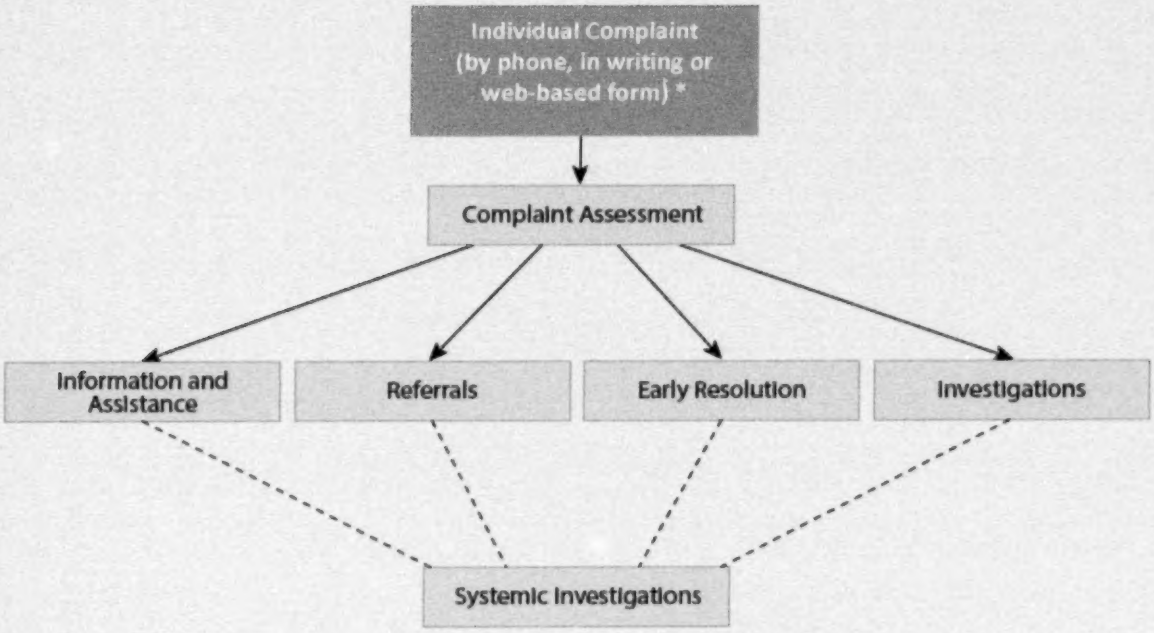
To ensure that every person in British Colombia is treated fairly in the provision of public services; to promote and foster fairness in public administration; and to uphold the democratic principles of openness, transparency and accountability.

Guiding Principles

Continuous Improvement, Equality, High Quality Service, Integrity, Leadership, Respect, Teamwork, Trusting Environment

Office of the Ombudsperson Core Operational Activities

The work of the office is carried out through an integrated process of intake, referral, early resolution, individual investigations and systemic investigations.



*The Ombudsperson can also initiate an investigation

Office of the Ombudsperson Corporate Shared Service Activities

The Office of the Ombudsperson provides support to four Offices of the Legislature through an efficient Corporate Shared Service support organization. These shared support services include finance, human resources, facilities and IT services.

Service Plan Structure

The Office of the Ombudsperson strategic goals are:

- Enhancing Understanding of the Principles of Good Governance
- Ensuring Administrative Fairness
- Providing Quality Service
- Supporting a Workplace of Excellence

We have identified key success factors that demonstrate the office is making progress towards those goals. Those key success factors are:

- Increased public and stakeholder awareness and understanding of administrative fairness
- Thorough and timely investigations
- Improved administrative fairness through focused, relevant recommendations and changes in actions, practices, policies and procedures
- Maintaining a healthy workplace environment

Those success factors have resulted in specific performance indicators that are measured in our performance matrix.

Included in this Service Plan is our performance measurement results for 2013/2014; an interim report on progress on 2014/2015 initiatives; planned activities for 2015/2016; and a projection for 2016/2017 and 2017/2018.

2013/2014 Performance Measures

Performance Measures Matrix				
Strategic Goal	**Outcome**	**Key Performance Indicator**	**Target**	**2013/2014**
Enhance Understanding of Principles of Good Governance	Increased public and stakeholder awareness of administrative fairness and role of Ombudsperson Office	% increase in website use	10%	9%
		Deliver presentations on administrative fairness	50	81
		Conduct outreach tours	2	3
Ensure Administrative fairness	Useful Systemic Reports	Reports identify key problem areas and provide useful recommendations	2 reports	2 reports
		Report out on status of implementation of recommendations made in systemic reports	100%	100%
Provide Quality Service	Timely access to office	% of calls answered within 45 seconds	80%	85%
	Timely completion of investigation	% of investigative files completed and closed within 3 months of acceptance of complaint	70%	63%
		% of investigative files completed and closed within 6 months of acceptance of complaint	85%	83%
Support a Workplace of Excellence	Highly skilled staff	% of staff who receive professional training	90%	82%

This reflects progress to date on 2014/2015 goals, priorities and initiatives.

1. *Enhance Understanding of Principles of Good Governance*

    - The Office of the Ombudsperson materials and website were expanded to include materials available in the ten most utilized languages in British Columbia.
    - The Office of the Ombudsperson website provides more accessibility to the visually impaired.
    - The Office has completed two outreach tours and has one further tour planned for 2014/2015 to the Greater Vancouver/Lower Mainland.

2. *Ensure Administrative Fairness*

    - There has been 100% reporting on the status of implementation of recommendations.
    - The Ministry of Health has responded to the individual recommendations made in our 2012 report on home and community care for seniors, *"The Best of Care: Part 2"*.

3. *Provide Quality Service*

    - Updated technology has been introduced to support expansion of scanning and electronic based files.

4. *Support a Workplace of Excellence*

    - Several opportunities for acting positions have been provided to staff as a result of recent departures.

There are two major projects which will be the focus of efforts in the remainder of 2014/2015. The first is to reduce the files awaiting assignment. The second is to complete the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan.

2015/2016 Goals, Priorities and Initiatives

In looking ahead to 2015/2016, and in the context of a continuing increase in service demand the office's priorities for 2015/2016 are:

- Maintain a high level of responsiveness at initial contact
- Reduce files awaiting assignment
- Build early resolution program capacity
- Expand advisory and preventive Ombuds activities

The initiatives for 2015/2016 are set out under the related goals. The service standards/key performance indicators remain the same.

Enhance Understanding of Principles of Good Governance

This both improves service delivery by public agencies and ensures that individuals who can benefit from the services of the Office of the Ombudsperson are aware of the office, the services it provides, and how to access them.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will enhance understanding of good governance and the role of administrative fairness in effective public administration through effective online and in-person outreach activities.

Initiatives 2015/2016:

- Enhance consultation with senior decision makers about areas of concern
- Provides targeted information about the role of the office in areas such as local government
- Focus at least one outreach tour on the Greater Vancouver area

Ensure Administrative Fairness

The fundamental rationale for the *Ombudsperson Act* and the operations of the office is to ensure that people who believe they have not been treated fairly by provincial public authorities have somewhere to turn to that can independently and impartially investigate to determine if that is the case and, if so, to propose a fair resolution. While the majority of the work completed in this area is done in the course of individual investigations, all business areas from Intake to Systemic Investigations have a role to play in ensuring administrative fairness.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will focus on identifying and fully utilizing the most effective mechanisms to ensure administrative fairness.

Initiatives 2015/2016:

- Assess selected public agency internal resolution processes for appropriateness and efficacy
- Expand monitoring of implementation of fair resolutions
- Examine mechanisms to enhance the usefulness of systemic reports

Provide Quality Service

This is a goal that requires internal focus. The Office of the Ombudsperson must model the administrative fairness principles it espouses even when facing constraints and challenges. To do so effectively, the office needs to obtain adequate resources and seek out new processes and technologies to allow it to most effectively deliver positive outcomes.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will maintain a high-level of responsiveness to complainants and improve tools to assist in timely completion of investigations.

Initiatives 2015/2016:

- Reduce Files Awaiting Assignment List
- Build early resolution program capacity
- Commence process to upgrade or replace Case Tracker System

Support a Workplace of Excellence

The Office of the Ombudsperson is a demanding, changeable environment in which to work. Call coordinators, complaints analysts and investigators must deal on an ongoing basis with upset or distraught callers and visitors. Corporate Shared Service staff must balance the service demands of four different offices. Our office depends on the professionalism and dedication of our staff and it is important that they perceive the Office of the Ombudsperson to be a workplace of excellence.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will provide a workplace where staff can develop their professional competences and careers.

Initiatives 2015/2016:

- On-going professional training for all staff
- Identify and provide opportunities for change and advancement within the office

2016/2017 and 2017/2018 Strategic Direction

The Office of the Ombudsperson's strategic direction in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 will be to increase the effective use of technology; to provide the most effective and timely resolutions to individual complaints; to increase public and stakeholder engagement; and to develop an effective advisory and preventive Ombudsmanship program.

It is anticipated that the upgrade or replacement of the Case Tracker System will require an increase in the capital budget which may affect these fiscal year budget projections.